

*A LETTER to a Member of Parliament,  
relating to the Bill for Preventing the  
Growth of Schism, &c.*

**Y**OU have so often declared your Dislike of all Persecution for Conscience sake, and the Sense you have of the Equity and Justice of that Toleration which we have so long enjoyed by Law, tho' you stand in no need of it your self, that we are encouraged to represent to you the deep Concern we are under on account of the Bill now before you.

What it is that has raised the Resentments of Your Honourable House against us at this Juncture, we cannot tell: But if we were not justly sensible of your Displeasure, we should be altogether unworthy of your Favour; and therefore we flatter our selves, that a fair and modest Representation of the Grievances we are threatned with, will not only be pardoned, but approved.

By the Account we have of this Bill, (which comes in so surprizingly, and moves with such Expedition) we apprehend it will bring very great and undeserved Hardships upon us, partly by reviving some Clauses in a former Law, and then laying us under new Restrictions and Penalties.

The Recital of the Act of Uniformity in the Preamble, and particularly of those Clauses in it relating to the Qualifications of such as teach Schools, and the Enacting Part that follows, put it out of all doubt, that we are to expect a very severe Execution of that Law.

It is not for us to arraign the Laws of our Country; but we hope Gentlemen will consider,

That even in that very Reign in which the Act of Uniformity was made, it was more than once recommended from the Throne, that Ease and Indulgence should be given to Dissenting Protestants, and that they were generally connived at in the Matter of their Schools, of which they had many, and some very considerable ones, both in City and Country.

That we have now for several Years enjoyed an Act of Toleration, by which many of the Penalties in that of Uniformity (as well as other Acts) stand suspended, under the Qualifications therein specified: Which Toleration we have been often assured, was then, and still is, designed to be made good and effectual; and therefore cannot but include in it all the necessary Means for obtaining the Ends of it; of which, we take this Liberty of directing the Education of our Children, to be a principal one.

This we the rather believe, because tho' in that Act of Indulgence the Clauses in the Act of Uniformity be not expressly repealed, yet we were at that time in the free and actual Enjoyment of the Liberty of teaching Schools; and since that time, when Prosecutions have been set on foot for it, they have generally been rather discountenanced by the Government, than executed with Rigour.

And we have always thought this Tendernefs has proceeded from a just Sense of the Expediency of allowing us that Freedom of Education, to make the Toleration more firm and secure to us, and more safe and inoffensive to the Established Church: Since without this, in Process of Time we must be left destitute of a Learned Ministry, or else be obliged to send our Children abroad for that Literature they are denied at home; either of which Cases must be attended with manifest and very great Inconveniencies, not only to our selves, but the Nation.

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These things we mention with all due Submission, and hope that upon impartial Consideration it will be evident, how unreasonable it must be to execute any Laws in being with rigour, meerly for our conscientious Care to educate our Children in the best manner we are able.

But that which is much more afflicting to us in the Bill now before you, is, that it will lay us under still greater Incapacities, and subject us to greater Hardships, for the Discharge of that Duty we owe to God and our Children in their Education.

Hereby Protestant Dissenters are not only debarr'd from teaching Grammar Schools, and Academical Learning; but this Incapacity is now extended to Reading, Writing, and other Literature. And how far these general Words [*other Literature*] may be carried by Construction, who can tell?

By this means many poor Men and Women, who make a hard Shift to support themselves and Families by teaching to Read, will be reduced to extreme Want, and brought as a Charge upon the Places where they live; and some of these are *French* Protestants, Ministers, and others that have forsaken all for Conscience sake.

As for those that teach Writing and Arithmetick, the Case appears still harder; for this is really a Trade, to which in many Places, and particularly in the City of *London*, Youth are put Apprentices, and serve seven Years, and then have their Freedom, as those that have served to any other Calling. This therefore takes away our Civil as well as Religious Privileges.

And if it should farther restrain Masters of Ships from teaching their Apprentices the Art of Navigation, how prejudicial would this be to our Trade and Nation.

It appears also to us, that this Bill will extend even to the Charity-Schools which have been set up by Dissenters, into which they have taken the Children of poor People without any Distinction, and taught them at very considerable Charges to read and write, and have cloathed some of them, and made it a Rule never to put any thing upon the Children, which the Consciences of the Parents do not allow of. Several such Schools are set up both in *London* and the Country, principally maintained by the Dissenters: Many of whom notwithstanding this do still contribute very liberally to those other Charity-Schools, that are regulated according to the Usages of the Church of *England*.

We think it very severe, that every School-Master or Mistress is not only obliged to receive the Sacrament according to the Usage of the Church of *England*, but restrained ever after from worshipping God among the Dissenters: In which we observe they are not allowed the Benefit of meeting within the limited Number of four, as by the *Act against Conventicles*, which is now enlarged to Nine by the *Act against Occasional Conformity*, which is a Hardship that was never yet put upon us.

And yet this Bill proceeds farther; and even after these School-Masters and Mistresses have thoroughly conformed to the Church as by Law Established, and totally left our way of Worship, they are forbidden to teach the *Assembly's Catechism*, or any other than that set forth in the Liturgy of the Church of *England*, or an Exposition thereof already allowed, or hereafter to be allowed by the Bishop of the Diocese, &c. This Clause will not only lay a Restraint upon those School-Masters, &c. that do conform, many of whom have taught other Catechisms; but now our Children must not be Catechised at all in Schools, since they not having had God-fathers and God-mothers, are incapable of answering with Truth to several Questions put in the *Church-Catechism*.

This Restraint appears the more unreasonable, because the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, which is generally taught by Dissenters, contains nothing in it but what is perfectly agreeable to the Doctrinal Articles and Homilies of the Church of *England*, not meddling with Church-Government and Discipline.

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Besides all this, we shall find our selves greatly aggrieved at the way and manner in which this Law is to be executed, which according to the Bill, is to be by a Summary Process without any Jury, or Benefit of *Certiorari*; by which we shall be subjected to the Will and Pleasure of a few Justices of the Peace, who will hereby be empowered to conclude us Guilty without Appeal.

And (which wounds us to the very Heart) all this is to come upon us for no other Crime than our conscientious Dissent from the Church as by Law Established, and our Care to bring up our Children in the best way and manner we can for their present and everlasting Welfare.

We are sensible of the Benefit of a Religious Education, and would gladly have our Children to enjoy that Advantage. We our selves must be at the Expence of their Instruction, none can love them better than we do, none are so immediately and directly charged by the Great God with their Education as we are, none can be more solicitous to find out for them such Instructors as shall set them a good Example, and have a watchful Eye over them, that their tender Minds may not be early defiled with Vanity and Vice.

We desire not to have them train'd up in Prejudices to any Body of Protestants in the Nation, nor perplexed with Matters of doubtful Disputation; we desire they may be left as free and unbiass'd, as can be in such things, till they are capable of forming a Judgment for themselves; and who can blame us if we would not have them in their Childhood taught to despise and reproach what their Parents esteem nothing but plain Scriptural Christianity? We would not have Prejudices infused into them so early against our own Profession and Practice, which must necessarily destroy that Reverence they ought to have for us, very much disturb the Order and Peace of our Families, and lessen the Pleasure and Comfort we promise our selves in them.

And we hope we shall be pardoned if we cannot conceal the Apprehensions we have, that should this Bill pass into a Law, it might open the way to still greater Severities. We would as much as possible avoid any offensive Insinuations, and yet cannot but observe that among the Arts that *Julian* used to extirpate Christianity, one was to lay a Restraint upon their Schools. Tho' he did not proceed so far as to suppress them wholly, those Schools were prohibited in which Rhetorick and Philosophy were taught, that the Professors of Christianity might be rendered incapable of defending it.

The Extirpation of the Reformed Religion in *France* was introduced by the Prohibition of their Schools, first of those in which the liberal Arts and Sciences were taught in the Year 1670. while the Reformed had still Liberty to teach Reading, Writing, and Accounts; but the very next Year they were limited to one School in a Town, and that only in those Places where the publick Exercise of their Religion was permitted, which was then confined to a narrow Compass, and soon after wholly taken away.

We are far from the Thoughts of comparing the Church of *England* to *Paganism* or *Popery*; but since we know our Dissent is conscientious, by how much less the things are suppos'd to be, in which we differ from you, so much the more Reason we have to expect Favour and Indulgence at your hands.

We lay a very great stress upon the repeated Assurances we have had from the Throne, that our Liberty shall be preserved inviolable; and on the Declaration made to the same effect in some Acts of Parliament, particularly that *against Occasional Conformity*. And yet when we see such Infringments and Restrictions one after another put upon our Liberty, we cannot be without very afflicting Apprehensions what the Consequence of these things may be; especially since it is still suggested, that the Church of *England* wants further Securities. How far the Jealousies some have conceived against us, may be carried, we cannot tell; or whether ever they will be removed, while we have any Liberty, or even Place left us in our native Country.

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We are not conscious to our selves that we have wilfully abused the Indulgence we have so long enjoyed: It having been our Care to avoid the just Displeasure of our Superiors: And while we see the Favours that have been dispensed to those in *North Britain*, who dissent from the Establish'd Church there, and observe Her Majesty's commendable and pious Zeal to recover and secure to our Protestant Brethren beyond Sea, the free Enjoyment of their Civil and Religious Rights, we hope we shall not be the only Body of Protestants in this part of the World, and even in this Serene and Pacifick Government, that shall be forced to labour under encreasing and undeserved Burthens.

We have taken this Freedom, *Sir*, to express our Thoughts to you, not only as you are one of our Representatives, but because many of us are known to you, and have been favoured with your friendly Conversation. And we leave it with you as our humble Request, that if any thing we have here suggested shall appear to you reasonable and proper, you would offer it to the House in that advantageous manner, which is usual with you. In the mean time we shall not cease to commit our selves, our Posterity, and all our Cause, to that Great and Good GOD, who is *wonderful in Counsel, and excellent in working*.

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